JFK Assassination FORUM

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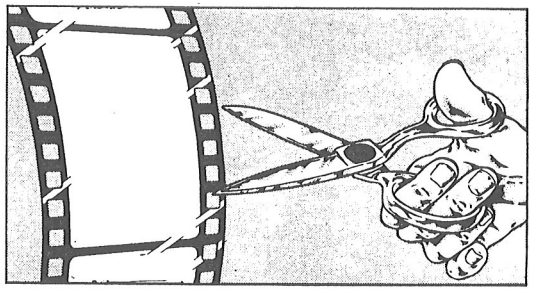
STOP PRESS: WE HOPE THAT OUR READERS ARE AWARE OF THE CURRENT SERIES BEING PUBLISHED BY THE SUNDAY MIRROR CONCERNING CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE JFK CASE. IF NOT, WE WOULD URGE THEM TO ENSURE THAT THEY GET HOLD OF A COPY OF THE OCTOBER 23,1977 ISSUE AS WE ARE PROMISED THAT IT WILL CONTAIN A MOST INTERESTING ARTICLE.....

ANOTHER PHANTOM SPLICER?

by Chris Scally



Most, if not all, of the readers of this newsletter are fully conversant with the damage done to the copy of the Zapruder film made available to the Warren Commission by Time-Life Inc. The Commission concluded that the first shot struck President Kennedy at or about Zapruder frame 210, yet frames 208, 209 and 210 itself were completely spliced from the film, and frames 207 and 211 bore clearly discernable splice marks. No satisfactory explanation of this seemingly deliberate damage has ever been put foward, so one may well suspect that there was a "phantom splicer" among the photographic technicians at Time-Life's photographic laboratory. Now, with the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Assassinations conducting a new investigation into the events of November 22,1963, it appears that another movie film of the assassination has fallen foul of a "phantom splicer". This time, however, the mystery-man has turned up at United Press International, and the film in question is the 8mm colour movie taken by Marie Muchmore.

UPI purchased the Muchmore - and Nix - film shortly after the assassination, and did several things with these two important items of photographic evidence. First, they published a book, Four Days, which included several frames from the two films, in colour. Three of these frames were from the Muchmore film. Secondly, they made a composite 35mm movie film from the original 8mm films, and this was shown to researchers at the UPI offices in New York in 1964/65. In 1964, UPI gave copies of both the Nix and Muchmore films to the Warren Commission for analysis. It should be noted here that Mrs Muchmore was never called before the Commission. When the Warren Commission disbanded, the Muchmore and Nix films were turned over to the National Archives in Washington under a special agreement

between UPI and the Archives. Under the terms of this contract, nobody was allowed to obtain copies of either film, or slides of individual frames, for any purpose, be it commercial or otherwise. Indeed, until researcher Harold Weisberg obtained written permission in 1966 from UPI, nobody was even allowed to see the Nix or Muchmore footage on file among the records of the Warren Commission in the Archives. Since Weisberg obtained permission, however, the Archives have interpreted his authorization in the broadest sense, and the films can now be seen under the supervision of the Archives' staff.

A few weeks ago I was fortunate enough to obtain a copy of the Muchmore film. The copy I received was a second-generation print, identical to the prints which were prepared for the House Select Committee. Of particular relevance to this article is the final segment of the film, showing the Presidential limousine before, during and immediately after the fatal shot to the President's head. In all there are sixty-one frames showing the motorcade's journey down Elm Street, and throughout this article the notation "M**" will indicate frame number "**" of the Elm Street sequence of film.

The sixty-one frames of the Muchmore footage under discussion here coincide with forty-three Zapruder film frames, Z280 through Z322. Since Abraham Zapruder's camera was filming at a speed of 18.3 frames per second it can therefore be calculated that the Muchmore camera was running at fractionally more than 26 frames per second. The spliced frames in the version of the Muchmore film made available to the Select Committee are M41, M43 and M45.

The Warren Commission made very limited use of the Muchmore film, publishing just three separate frames as part of Commission Exhibit (CE) 885. Additionally, CE 902 contained the frame from the Muchmore film said by the Commission to coincide with Z313, the moment of impact of the fatal shot to JFK's head. Comparison with M42 published in CE 885 suggests that M42 is also the frame which appears in CE 902. This conclusion, first published in 1970 by Richard E.Sprague in his significant Computers and Automation article on the Photographic Evidence, and confirmed by my own study of the relevant photographs, has since been acknowledged by the National Archives in a July 11,1977 letter to me. They also then confirmed that CE 906, the Warren Commission's copy of the Muchmore film, is completely intact!

The damage to the Select Committee's version of the Muchmore film, while very obvious, is most difficult to understand since no frames would appear to be missing or transposed. For example, to omit or transpose frames could possibly have the effect of changing the direction of the President's head movement after the fatal shot, as happened when frames of the Zapruder film were transposed in the published evidence (H18 pp.70/71). However, that is not true in this case.

M41 contains two horizontal splice marks, one at the top of the frame and the other at the bottom. The top one is approximately three-quarters of the way down. Frame M45 is spliced in a very similar fashion. I have been given to understand that the damage to M43 was caused by over-exposure to heat, and this explanation is satisfactory in that the splice mark runs horizontally through the centre of the frame and is obviously the result of a repair being carried out. The splices in M41 and M45 cannot be so easily explained away.

My efforts to elicit an explanation from UPI have so far proved to be unsuccessful. Initially, I wrote to their London office in the hope that, should they be unable to answer my questions, they would foward my letter to their Head Office in New York. After more than three weeks had elapsed and no reply had been received, I contacted the London office by telephone. Not only did they claim that my letter had never reached them, but their main concern seemed to be in ascertaining where I had obtained my copy of their film, rather than in making any attempt to assist me. My subsequent letter to UPI Head Office remains unanswered to date!

Since my information is that the film was damaged prior to copies being made for use by the Select Committee, it is imperative that one ask, "Why?". As noted earlier, it appears that although M41 and M45 are spliced, the central parts of the two frames between the upper and lower splices have not been swapped about. It might be argued that this damage was completely accidental, until the following points are considered:

(1) The original film is, naturally, undamaged.
(2) The copy of the Muchmore film given by UPI to the Warren Commission in 1964 is undamaged.
(3) The version of the film shown to researchers in New York in 1964/65, and again in 1967, was not damaged.
(4) The failure of UPI to reply to my letters suggests that, rather than make a statement which might be used against them at a later date, they wish to use that phrase well-known to all politicians - "No Comment".

Bearing in mind these points, it does not seem unreasonable to postulate the theory that the damage done to the Muchmore film was a crude and deliberate attempt to demean both the Select Committee and its work. Of course the Committee can view the Warren Commission's copy of the Muchmore film in the National Archives: of course the Committee has the power to subpoena the original footage from UPI: "But why make it easy for them?" appears to be the attitude, not only of UPI in relation to the Muchmore film, but of the media in general towards the new investigation.

As soon as the Committee was voted into existence in September 1976 the media began to trot out the well-worn "fallback" theory - "Castro did it!". When it was discovered that the Chief Counsel and Staff Director was to be Richard A.Sprague, a tough prosecutor with the highest possible credentials and a formidable legal reputation, the Fidel Castro theory became untenable and the character-assassination campaign began. Those who wish to see this investigation aborted have so far been unsuccessful. However, every "red herring" from spliced films to contrived testimony will no doubt continue to be placed in the way of the Committee's work.

This fruitless search for the "phantom splicer" is my small effort to help in keeping the Select Committee on the trail of the truth, rather than being diverted on to endless wild goose chases. This article has been made available to them in the hope that it reduces - even by one day - the length of time we must wait before we know what really happened in Dealey Plaza almost fourteen years ago

NOTICE TO READERS

For some months I have been attempting to persuade my good friend Harry Irwin to take over JFK.AF. He has a truly remarkable variety of contacts in the USA and has been the indirect source of most of my material.

Now that he has at last agreed to assume the mantle, I can confidentally predict a more up-to-the-minute product appearing on a regular businesslike basis - and I urge readers to stay with us.

I shall, of course, remain closely associated with the newsletter and shall continue to write for it. This issue marks the last of the present unit. My thanks to those who have already sent their renewal subscriptions. For the rest, please contribute to keeping the ONLY British newsletter on the Great American Conspiracy in a solvent state

BRIAN BURDEN

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

These are now due to cover Issues No.20-25. This is a non-profit making venture and we exist solely to provide an information service related to events connected with the JFK assassination. Postal charges alone for six issues in Britain amounts to £0.42 and despite ever-rising printing charges and incidental expenses we are trying to hold our rate at £1.50. US subscribers can take advantage of a trial six-month subscription at only $5.00 and this includes AIRMAIL postage!

We need your urgent support to survive!

Please renew immediately and try to attract additional subscribers. We reckon that if we could muster 100 paid-up members we would be in a very healthy state. Therefore please spread the word - but, don't forget to send you remittance, made payable to:

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If you have any comments or suggestions as to improvement let him have it!

HERE'S TO AN EXCITING SIX MONTHS!!

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